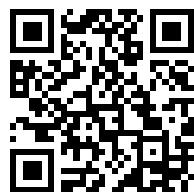

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OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY.

PRESENTED BY R.T.Crane.

COMMON SCHOOLS

vs.

UNIVERSITY

By R. T. CRANE

CHICAGO

1911

COMMON SCHOOLS

VS.

UNIVERSITY

TO THE MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATURE:

I appreciate that a member of the legislature is a very busy man, so am I; therefore I shall make my plea as brief as the facts and the importance of the subject permit.

You have before you bills appropriating upward of \$5,000,-000 for the University (what the Committee on Appropriations may recommend I do not know), and another bill appropriating \$4,500,000 to the common-school fund. The burden of taxation is already so great that both of these are impossible. So the question comes — where should the money to be spent for educational purposes go? To the University, where less than two per cent of the boys and girls will ever go, or to the elementary schools, where over ninety per cent of the boys and girls will receive all the education they will ever get?

Ordinarily the greatest good to the greatest number should settle that question. To change that rule the advocates of wasting money upon higher schooling and starving the elementary schools to that extent must show that higher schooling is worth to the public what it costs, and that the elementary schools are not being injured by the lavish outlay of money for the University — this they can not do.

Personally, I believe that the higher schooling of to-day is worthless, so far as ninety per cent of those who receive it are concerned. I say this after making a painstaking investigation, and after careful consideration. Of course, I have no objection to people having this higher schooling, if they get it as they get any other gew-gaw — by paying for it. My contention is that when anything of so little value is furnished by the State and at such an enormous expense, it is detrimental to other parts of our educational system.

Our University was founded to give training in "such branches of learning as are related to agriculture and the mechanic arts." It was organized primarily to make educated farmers. In this respect it has wholly failed, as my investigations among the farmers in the vicinity of the University show. It has taken up every "ology" and "ism," and throughout its whole existence has educated a thousand boys away from the farm to every one that it has educated to remain on the farm. It has utterly failed in its mission.

Realizing its failure it has aimed to hide it by pretending to train for every other calling under the sun. Its presumptuous claims are considered in the article enclosed herewith. Within a comparatively few years it has again made a frenzied attempt to make farmers by getting the boys away from the farm, filling their heads with a lot of stuff that bears no relation to successful, practical farming. The whole training is given under conditions as far from those of the average farmer as possible. They seem to forget that one learns farming from observing the best farmers under average conditions, not from books, finely spun theories and costly experiments.

Again, the agricultural college claims that the farmers are deficient in the running of their farms, yet admits that it is doing nothing in the way of issuing general instructions directing the farmers how to operate their farms to the best advantage, and that it has never taken a farm and operated it for the purpose of demonstrating what it is capable of producing under what might be termed scientific or intelligent farming, which would be the natural and businesslike method if the college possessed any information of value to the farmers. It further confesses that the best demonstrations of good farming are those that are being made on thousands of successful farms throughout the State. This goes right to the bottom of this whole question. The college made these admissions in a letter to me.

When it has achieved any results it has failed to put them in a language which the farmers can understand. A county superintendent thus describes the value of its "literature":

"The farmer needs a college course in general and a short course in agriculture in particular, that he may read the 'literature.' Then, with the aid of the Century Dictionary and Encyclopedia Britannica for reference, he may get a little information."

It has failed to show that the application of its principles on an average farm can produce results. The average farmer must pay the interest on the value of his farm before he can get any return for his own labor. Were these "college" farmers to take a farm, and by their methods increase the income, it no doubt would encourage better methods; but instead, they operate on the same plan as the gentleman farmer, the man who has a farm on which to spend money which he had made in some other business.

The farmers as a class do not favor agricultural schools. The county clerks of Illinois and surrounding States furnished me the names of 464 representative farmers in the vicinity of the agricultural schools, and who should be most conversant with their value—if they have any. One hundred and sixty-three replied in whole or in part to my questions; 41 pronounced the colleges beneficial, but gave no reason; 54 were favorable and gave reasons; 68 said they had no value. Those who favor the colleges do so because they believe they are disseminators of useful information. Like myself they place little or no value on the agricultural college as a place where boys may be taught practical farming.

This view is corroborated by these facts: Of the 68 who said they had not been benefited by the agricultural colleges, 9 said they had employed college graduates on their farms and that they had all proved to be unsatisfactory. Of the 95 who are favorable to agricultural colleges, 11 have employed such help and 3 pronounce it unsatisfactory. Only forty per cent of all those employed were satisfactory. Since so few—20 out of 163—employed this kind of help, the others must have a very poor opinion of it. Only 5 out of the 95 who are in favor of the agricultural colleges have sent their children to them. Among those unfavorable three sent their children, and in two cases they report that the result was not satisfactory. Is it not strikingly inconsistent that so few of those who favor these colleges have employed their graduates or have sent their children to the colleges?

Less than sixty per cent of the farmers feel that because of the experiment-station work the college is beneficial. From the number who employed college-trained help or sent their children to the colleges, it is evident that ninety per cent consider the agricultural school proper of no account.

The agricultural college, thus far at least, has been the fifth wheel to the farmer's wagon, and it has cost him a pretty penny to keep it going. Until the farmer or the agricultural college can show definite and really valuable results coming from the agricultural education of the day, common sense and sound business judgment demand that it be discontinued.

THE UNIVERSITY COSTS TOO MUCH.

The aim of our University seems to be to build up a big plant and make a splurge. If these enormous expenditures are necessary, how is it that the small colleges can give equally as good training, and sometimes better, with low tuition fees and a meager endowment. Our extravagance knows no bounds. The agricultural college is a shining example of extravagance run mad.

I notice that it is asking you for a \$40,000 cow barn, a \$40,000 horse barn, a \$100,000 judging pavilion, a \$12,000 dairy investigation barn, a \$15,000 sheep building and so forth. Why not build these buildings of marble, have them steam-heated and with private bathrooms for each animal? A successful farmer could build substantial and satisfactory buildings for all the horses, cattle and sheep kept by the University for \$10,000 or less, while the University proposes to spend twenty times that amount. Is this waste calculated to breed in the students habits of economy and thrift and to make them satisfied with the conditions under which they must work at home? Such waste of the people's money amounts to criminal carelessness; but this is not the worst feature.

THE MAINTENANCE OF THE UNIVERSITY ROBS THE RURAL AND ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS.

The University has been built up at the expense of the country and elementary schools. People will spend about so much for education. This is especially true of the farmers. If you spend the larger part of this upon the University then the country schools will suffer to that extent. The present local rate of taxation is considered burdensome. The people will not add anything to it. If the general taxes are increased to provide for the University in the lavish manner asked for, it will mean that the farmer will make a further cut in the money for his own school. But if all the money which the State proposes to

expend for education is added to the common-school fund, he will not cut his local tax but will use this extra money to provide his children with better teachers and better school conditions generally. This has been the experience of other States.

Let us not forget that ninety per cent of all the boys and girls are going to receive all the education they get in these same elementary schools. If we are going to do anything for them we must do it through these schools. That they are now in serious need of more money is only too apparent.

Says one county superintendent:

"It is no secret that we are a long, long way from the ideal country school, and the reason can be expressed in one word—neglect. In the past, and it is largely true to-day, the country school has been neglected by all who should have given it their fostering care. But neglect of the country school by State and educators is trivial compared with the almost criminal neglect of it by the farmers themselves. To one who hasn't seen it it is inconceivable.

"The farmers have been niggardly in providing for their schools. They have increased their school year and its requirements just enough to get their share of State money, and they have searched far and wide in their efforts to get, not the best, but the cheapest teachers. The schoolhouses have been neglected in a manner to bring the blush of shame to any self-respecting citizen."

He thus pictured a country teacher:

"Her speech was ungrammatical, her preparation having extended but little beyond the completion of the course of study she was now trying to teach. I never saw any one who was working more earnestly, according to the light she had. She drove three miles each morning, took care of her horse, dug the wood from the snow, built her fire and swept—as far as possible—and for six hours strove to make those girls and boys into efficient citizens. Then she drove home to prepare her lessons for the morrow. And for these services, properly and faithfully rendered in educating future presidents, she received the munificent sum of \$27.50 a month, a yearly salary of \$192.50;"

and continues:

"The farmer has the poorest school when he should have had the best, because he can have the best for the least money. He has no expensive site or building to purchase and maintain. He can put practically all his money into a teacher.

"Theoretically, the farmer believes very strongly in education; practically, he doesn't, for what to him seem very good

reasons. He does not take kindly to giving his boy a university education and having him drift off to the city, there to contribute his brawn, his brain, his honesty, to the city's cause and accumulate but little money, while his neighbor's son whose education did not exceed beyond the fifth grade, has remained on the farm and accumulated his share of this world's goods. If every time a boy secures an education he is lost to his parents and the farm, the farmer naturally concludes that education is to blame. Between an ignorant boy on the farm and an educated boy away from the farm, he prefers the former.

"What is the result? Not to exceed forty per cent of the country children reach the sixth grade, and only one-third of those who enter this grade complete the course. It is entirely safe to say the efficiency of our country-school plant is not more than fifty per cent of what it should be, because of irregular attendance. Half of what we spend is wasted."

Speaking of the country schools of Cook County, Dr. A. F. Nightingale has said:

"There are still so-called school buildings in Cook County, as I presume in every county, which would make neither good sheepfolds nor excellent dog-kennels. They are antiquated, shabby, shop-worn, obsolescent and obsolete. They never were fit dwelling places for human bodies or human souls for six hours in a day. Many schools are without supplementary reading, without libraries, without maps, without charts, without well-chosen, well-graded and uniform text-books, without anything to encourage, to uplift or inspire. Is it any wonder that only the inexperienced and incompetent or, in other words, the mediocre among teachers, will accept these positions, and that they seldom remain in one place more than one season?

"If the farmers or the men in any kind of business who hire teachers should till their fields and manage their affairs as they supervise the schools, they would reap in the autumn time less than they sowed in the springtime, and the balance on their ledgers at the close of the year would be on the wrong side."

Speaking of the country children he asks:

"Why is it that the schools that they attend, with notable exceptions, seem to repress rather than impress, to dull rather than sharpen their wits, and to leave them at the end of the year with the merest modicum of interesting and profitable knowledge? There are many reasons and, sad to say, potent reasons."

In his last report are these words:

"Labor as one may, counsel as we do, instruct as we please, protest, persuade, plead and pray, the results are unsatisfactory. There are notable exceptions, but in general we found and still find these schools in a deplorable condition.

Whether we consider them from a material or a teaching point of view, there is little to commend and much to condemn. Over many may be written truthfully now, 'Let him who enters here, leave hope behind.'

The State Superintendent of Schools has stated that the State would be better-off if five hundred of these rural schools were closed for the reason that the teachers are so inefficient they are incapable of teaching. That practically means that the people in these districts are not getting any education.

I asked the County Superintendent, quoted above, to what he attributed the deplorable condition of the country schools at present. His answer was:

"We have been so busy building, maintaining and blindly worshiping the so-called higher institutions of learning that we have forgotten the schools for the masses, the school of our fathers, the school where the real men, 'the live wires,' of to-day laid the foundation of their careers. We have lavished money upon our great universities, dealt liberally with our high schools, and have been miserly in our treatment of the country school."

In the cities the schoolrooms are overcrowded. Teachers are too few; their wages are too low, while a great many children are forced to go to work and earn a living, not even being able to take advantage of the limited school opportunities offered them. Would it not be better to use the money we have been in the habit of squandering upon higher education to provide better and more teachers at living salaries, better material equipment, yea, even make some arrangement by which the child who must work to earn a living, could be paid the pittance which his labor brings and sent to school?

The University and the Agricultural College are unnecessary. All in the way of education that is necessary for a farm lad to have to make him a successful, up-to-date farmer could be given in the schools of the country districts at but a trifling additional increase of the present common-school tax. Let every district school have a good teacher of manual training and elementary mechanics for the boys, and a good teacher of the domestic arts—cooking, sewing, etc., for the girls—and the taxpayer would be getting something worth while for the small added tax. Let this be done well first. Make the foundation sound and broad.

Surely it is vastly more important to teach farmers how to

take care of themselves than to teach them how to fatten cattle, feed horses and raise hogs. Teach the farm boys and girls in the common schools how to make better and more comfortable homes, how to do better cooking, how to use their heads and hands to much more general advantage. Teach them more of these simple, practical, needful things, and no one need worry about their learning all the practical agriculture they require right on the farm.

I wish here to repeat that I am not opposed to education, but only to its useless and extravagant frills and fads. I am most decidedly a champion of that education which, first, aids a man in earning a livelihood, and so contributes to his own happiness; and second, makes of him a good citizen, and thus contributes to the happiness of others. The education the farmer needs to meet both of these essentials he should get in the country common schools. His practical education he may get best—in fact, only—on the farm. If he feels that he wants more than this he should not expect the public to pay for it.

The same general principles apply to the residents of the cities and villages. What their children need they should get in the elementary schools; anything more they should pay for themselves.

It affords me no pleasure to call your attention to the deficiencies in our elementary schools, but as one interested in real education I deem it my duty to do so. I appeal to you to spend every dollar upon these neglected schools of the masses. The perpetuity of the State depends upon the masses, not upon the few, and every child should have an opportunity to attend school and to secure as good an elementary education as can be given.

I appeal to you in behalf of those who believe that our present higher schooling is an extravagance in which the State has no moral right to engage. I appeal to you in behalf of the over-worked and underpaid teachers in the common schools. In behalf of the boys and girls who must be content with a common-school education or less, I appeal to you to make these schools what they should be. Until then I appeal to you to spend millions for the common schools, but not one cent for higher schooling.

Yours truly,

R. T. CRANE.

Date Due

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